1:Barnes E-5 (1946-1949)1954 FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni



because of a divergence of interest between one or more of its inferior segments and the residue. In some instances all the people in the segment were killed, as presumably was the intention when Zwangendaba sent warriors to destroy segment 18. In other instances not everyone was killed and those whose lives were spared were drafted to some other part of a major segment to which they belonged. In the only examples I know of, in which either of these last two alternatives was adopted, action was taken by the highest lieutenants in the segments founded for the great wives of reigning chiefs, and was prompted by allegedly hostile acts directed against the chief. Heads of lesser segments could not readily act in this way for although the Paramount Chief and his lieutenants did not possess a monopoly of this power, they regarded its exercise by others with suspicion as a threat to the unity of the State.

If some of the members of an eliminated segment escaped annihilation, they might presently reform themselves into a new segment and begin a separate existence again. If they were not kinsmen of their lord, no structural complications ensued. If, however, relatives of the lord were concerned, then there might be conflict between the position required of them because of their relationship and that in which their new segment was formed. Thus, if the village of a great wife was annihilated and later a new village was founded for her, this could never replace the original one. Her subordinate bands of co-wives had formed their villages by breaking out from her original village; and that had been their headquarters. The new village was founded after they had made their own, and was not their headquarters, even though they still acknowledged that its head was their great co-wife. As we have seen, such a sequence of events occurred at a critical stage of Ngoni history, and may have influenced the way in which the State split.

### 2. *Age-sets*

The residential system was dominant in deciding the alignment of persons in most situations, but the waging of war and execution of certain ceremonies were organized on a different basis. The army was divided into age-set regiments. About every three or four years,[1] depending on the military requirements and on the availability of lads of the right age, a new regiment was formed from all the boys aged about fifteen years old. They assembled at the Paramount Chief's great wife's village and were inducted into the army. The chief gave them a regimental name and they came under the orders of his senior lieutenants. An experienced warrior

[1] cf. Witte, 'Expedição', p. 470.

1:Barnes E-5 (1946-1949) 1954 FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni



from a senior regiment was given command of the new regiment. This post seems not to have been politically so important as it was among the Zulu, where princes commanded regiments. In major battles, regiments fought as tactical units.

A list of regimental names is given in Table III. Some regiments had more than one proper name, and sometimes that portion of a regiment belonging to a single major segment was given a name of its own.

The regimental system was more formally prescribed than the residential system, in that every lad had to join, and his regiment was, at least initially, fixed for him by his apparent age. But even here there was some possibility of manipulation. Men were expected to defer to members of senior age-sets and a well-favoured warrior might gain promotion from one regiment to the next above, either because of his own prowess in war or because the senior regiment was short of men. There were some offices of leadership within a regiment, but I was unable to discover what they were or how they were filled. Certain warriors were selected for special tasks, such as spying or scouting or forming an advance guard. But the greatest measure of flexibility derived from the nature of the activities carried on under this system. Some men fought well, others did not. Some survived and some were killed in battle. The successful warrior was rewarded by his superiors with dependants and thus he established his own segment. Thus success in one system led to advancement in the other.

On national raids one or more regiments were mobilized and were commanded by a senior lieutenant from the Paramount Chief's great wife's segment. Some informants said that in the line of battle men from the same segment were separated, so that there would be less chance of their being killed all at once. However within a regiment there must have been cleavages on segmentary lines, for at least in later years the leader of a major segment would from time to time mobilize all the men in his segment belonging to certain regiments and send them off raiding. Thus the Ngoni military system differed from the Zulu, in which the king alone was able to mobilize age-sets. Some of the segmentary divisions within Ngoni regiments had their own proper names. In battle, the men of a regiment might be divided for tactical reasons but this was not a lasting arrangement, and the only permanent cleavages within a regiment appear to have been those determined by the residential system. There does not seem to have been any system of non-territorial sectors, nor was there any organization, apart from the State-organized regiments, by which men of a single segment

[Text continues on page 39]

1:Barnes E-5 (1946-1949)1954 FR5 Ngoni FR5
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involving perhaps between a dozen and a hundred men, whereas the Paramount Chief could, so long as the State remained intact, command the services of perhaps 10,000 warriors.

This unifying effect of the age-set system applied particularly to the recent captives. It appears to have been through the regimental system that recent captives, both men and women, were indoctrinated into Ngoni ways and made to feel that they, too, were Ngoni. In the residential system, recent captives were dependants rather than lords. In the age-set system there was no such distinction. Men captives were drafted into the regiment appropriate to their apparent age, and boys were enrolled with their coevals. They were called upon to fight in the same way as their aristocratic comrades, and were offered the same prospects of promotion, both within the age-set system and in the segmentary organization, as a result of successful fighting. Many of the well-remembered segment heads who achieved rapid promotion after capture are described as being successful warriors.

The annual first fruits ceremony (*nkwala*) was organized on an age-set basis. Although I was not able to establish details of this ceremony, it is clear that it was the most memorable national ceremony in the year, and that it provided supernatural sanction to the cohesion of the State and of the various regiments, under the leadership of the Paramount Chief. There were dances and mock fighting between regiments, and women also fought with each other in age-set groups of some kind or other. Read states that the description of the ceremony she was given showed much similarity with the corresponding Swazi ceremony. Commentators on the Swazi and Zulu ceremonies describe them as strengthening the army and the kingship and unifying the nation, by a dramatic exaggeration of the conflicts as well as the links within it, and it is probable that this was true also of the Ngoni.[9]

The Ngoni and their neighbours formed part of a wide social system, and the relationship between them was a political one. When the Ngoni moved from place to place, the area round them was vacated by its former inhabitants, so as to leave a dwelling-area for the Ngoni and a no-man's-land isolating it from other inhabited areas. These moves were forced on the indigenous people by Ngoni raids. There were no direct relations between States, for there was little concerted opposition to Ngoni raiding

[9] cf. Read, 'Tradition', p. 470; Kuper *African Aristocracy*, pp. 223-5; Gluckman, 'First fruits ceremonies', pp. 30-3. The Swazi ceremony is called *incwala*, and Read's informants called it *inqwala*, but my informants had lost their click consonants.

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
FR5 Ngoni FR5



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*Herding as preparation for war*

Preparation for war began in youth. When boys were about ten or twelve they were sent to herd goats or calves; when they were older they herded the cattle. At this time the boys were in the bush with their elders who were often haughty and fierce. The older herders taught the boys how to fight and how to defend themselves. They taught them to fight with twigs and sticks; the older herders fought with *izinduku* (knobkerries) and *izinkhonjo* (wooden swords). They were not allowed to fight with real spears though some had them. The older herders stirred up the hearts of the younger to fight and taught them to strike each other with knobkerries and to use little shields. If the herders of one village met the herders of another, the bulls were teased till they fought, and the little herders also. The small herders were not allowed to say anything about the herding to their parents. The older herders also loved to fight as in war with those of other villages. At such times the older men and even the elders came out from the village to see the battle and to stir up the hearts of the boys. If the herders of one village ran away they were laughed at, but the winners were greatly praised.

At the time when the cattle ate the refuse in the maize-gardens, after harvest, fighting most often broke out. Some of the boys provoked their neighbours to go and drive the cattle into the maize-fields of another village deliberately. The custom was that cattle might eat in the maize-gardens of their own village and the boys ought to ask if they may go into the fields of others. The herders did this to annoy the other herders and to start a fight. Often a great struggle was the result and the young men of the village who had outgrown herding joined in the fight to help the youngsters of their village. But they did it sensibly, none caused a wound with a spear, for anyone who did that was punished by law.

So the boys grew accustomed to the first steps in fighting which would help them later in war. Those who knew how to protect themselves with a knobkerry and small shield had no scars on their heads, but there were many long ago who had scars from fighting in the herding time. Children of the chief were in the same predicament—if they could not defend themselves they were beaten by their herding companions and possibly got their heads broken. The flowing of blood was not considered very serious, only if one did it in a stealthy way then he had to pay compensation. In this way the boys grew up with stout hearts and loved fighting.

Another thing which excited the boys was the custom of whistling. The boys were very expert and quick in expressing changes of mood in whistling. This was done so that the cattle would go carefully or quickly, but also when they were fighting the herders loved to whistle and even the older men in war did so also. The whistling stirred up the hearts of those who were thinking of running away. There were many ways of whistling and some were very good at it.

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*Enlistment*

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When the young men reached the age of 21–26 they left off herding. Sometimes it was their fathers who stopped them, sometimes they themselves wished to stay at home. They took their shields (*amahawu*) and

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
FR5 Ngoni FR5



their spears and gathered together; they went to the kraal and began to dance the *ligubo* war dance. Sometimes they set themselves in order as though they were out on a raid; they came out at the right middle of the kraal and went *pa lisango*, toward the gate, singing, marching, and shaking their shields and spears. Sometimes they retreated as though running from the enemy, then turned about as though running to meet the enemy again. This was done to show how they could fight and defend themselves from the enemy. It showed that the boys were now young men and of the warrior class, and they were asking to be admitted to the status of grown men. If the old men agreed that their prayer should be granted they were formed into a new regiment (*libandla*) and were given a senior to lead and govern them.

*The Army*

All the war companies were under the Paramount. He had the power to call the whole army to go out against enemies. But all big villages and villages of men of reputation had their own companies, like Zulu Gama, Njerenjere Sibande and many others. These companies were under the war *induna* of the Paramount and when they were called they came quickly to the village of the Paramount which was the central meeting place. A *libandla* (company) was divided into *mabuto* (sections) sometimes of 100 or more. For each section there was an *induna* who led it in war, judged all disputes, and spoke for it to the war *induna*. The war *induna* was the eye of the Paramount in all that pertained to war.

The army was divided into companies corresponding to the districts or chiefs' villages and all the company leaders were under the war *induna*. All the parts of the army were divided in lesser parts in accordance with the generation of the young men, *amajaha*, and the older men, *amadoda*.

*Mobilization*

If desired the Paramount had power to send a summons through the whole country that his army should mobilize in his village in order that he might see it. The lesser chiefs had the same power for their districts. The man who delivered the summons went into the kraal and shouted that the Paramount wished the army to gather at the central meeting place. The message was spread everywhere. Then all the sections in the villages and in the districts of the lesser chiefs and clan heads hastened to come at the appointed time. The Paramount prepared cattle to be killed for the army. As the sections were marching in they sang the songs called *imihubo*. Section by section they chose their *muhubo* for arriving and entering the kraal and each section drew up by itself. An open space was left between the sections so that they might be known.

When they had all gathered in their places the herald rose and shouted '*Uyezwa na*', 'Do you hear?' '*Utsho njalo yenkosi, uti, Ayigube*', 'Thus saith the Paramount, let them dance.' This was to tell the sections to begin the war-dance. Each section got up with one heart and made a wide circle and began to dance. One of them began a song which he remembered on the spur of the moment from the *ligubo* and led off, the whole section took it up waving their shields and thrusting with their spears now right now left according to their step and each foot stamping the ground.

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
FR5 Ngoni FR5



allowed to marry and settle down in their villages.[1] Since he also had the sole right of forming a new regiment of young men and giving it a name, he controlled the intake to the army as well as the discharge of seasoned warriors.

The big war *induna* served directly under the Paramount. Associated with him were other subordinate war leaders or *izinduna*, one of whom was always at the head of each regiment. Considerable emphasis was laid by Cibambo and other Ngoni informants on the essentially military character, in pre-European days, of the office and function of the *izinduna*, who were officials serving the whole kingdom. We shall see in Chapters III, IV and V how the term *induna* was also used for civil officials at the royal village and in the courts, as well as for the men in charge of sections of a village and of houses.

The account of the mobilization of the army shows that the Ngoni had changed the system of military barracks concentrated about the capital, described by Gluckman as typical of the Zulu military organization and by Kuper for the Swazi. Gluckman said that the chiefs assembled their people in territorial, not age, divisions, and that the age regiments belonged to the king alone and lived in or near his capital.[2] In pre-European days the Ngoni, according to Cibambo and to other informants, had in their armies territorial divisions as well as age regiments, and there was no concentration of young warriors by age regiments round the Paramount's village.[3]

When a summons to war went forth, the warriors in the territory of each chief or *mulumuzana* assembled at his head village as a *libandla*. This included the warriors from the outlying villages and from the head village. Cibambo's use of the term *libandla* emphasized that it was a territorial unit, divided into *mabuto* (which he called sections) on the basis of age.

When each *libandla* arrived at the Paramount's village ready for warfare, the different age groups within it joined up with their parallel age groups from other *mabandla* to form regiments. The Ngoni term for these national regiments was *mabuto*, the same term as that used for the age divisions of the *mabandla*. Old men who had been warriors in their youth expressed to me many times their immense pride in their own *libuto*, and it had for them something of the tradition and prestige of a famous school. They would recite the names of other *mabuto*, beginning with their own as the most recent, and going backwards through ten or more regimental names to those who had crossed the Zambesi with

[1] Cibambo in the text spoke of warriors wearing the head-ring. The usual practice, according to informants, was to give the head-ring at the end of service in the army. Cibambo may have been referring to former warriors with a head-ring putting on war-dress for a ceremony.

[2] Gluckman, M. 'The Kingdom of the Zulu', in *African Political Systems*, 1940, p. 31.

[3] One example of a concentration of young men was reported at the village of the Queen Mother in the central kingdom in 1898 in *The Central African Times*, see Memorandum XVI, International African Institute, 1938, p. 18.

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5



women's. For all ceremonies the men sat on the right side, and the women on the left, the place of honour for the leading man and woman being by the main door-posts. No young man or woman ever thought of sitting near them. The other place of significance lay between the fire and the back of the hut on the right-hand side; it was known as the 'place of the spirits', the 'ancestors' corner', where the baskets and spears and other ritual objects were kept which were used in the ancestral cult. Only the owner of the hut or those taking part in the ritual could approach this corner.

In this land, into the cultural pattern of Ngoni village and household life, the Ngoni children were born. In such villages and homes they passed their earlier years, and grew from boys and girls to young adults.

### *The Ngoni kingdoms*

When the Ngoni made parts of Nyasaland their homeland they set up conquest states on the pattern which they had been familiar with in southern Africa. Where they settled, they either conquered the local peoples who lived in that area, or accepted their submission. Until the British administration was established the Ngoni carried on wars and raids against neighbouring peoples to enlarge the boundaries of their kingdoms. As a conquest state, similar to that of the Ndebele in Southern Rhodesia, the population of the Ngoni kingdoms was of mixed origin, some whose ancestors came from Natal, some from the territories passed through on their northward march, and some from Nyasaland itself.

The kingdoms were organized on a centralized pattern with the Paramount Chief as supreme ruler and subordinate chiefs under him. The Ngoni code of law operated in the courts of the chiefs, and, as they proudly said, 'there was one law for all people'. Military service was required from all young men, and each territorial chief had to bring his quota of warriors to the Paramount's village when a war summons went out. Military service, obedience to the law,

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5



behaviour especially to elders, and to enforce by dramatic and sometimes brutal means a submissive attitude towards authority. That objective, as we have seen, was carried out by the Ngoni throughout their training of their children, from the earliest age upwards. They were half amused and half scandalized at the idea that young people had to be put in a camp in the bush in order to teach them how to behave.

*Cultural changes in the assumption of adult roles*

It is necessary to look back for a moment to the Ngoni past in order to see how changed external conditions in Nyasaland had altered the sequences and the timing of the process by which youths and young girls were recognized as adults. The stages of arriving at social maturity had been speeded up by cultural changes. In the days of warfare the senior herd-boys, from about twenty years of age, were called up at irregular intervals to form a new regiment. From this time they were known as 'young men' or 'youths', and they fought in the tribal wars for five years. In the off-season, during the rains when raids were not carried out, they were called to clear and cultivate the gardens of the Paramount and chiefs, and to help build houses and fence cattle kraals. At approximately the age of twenty-six to twenty-eight they were ordered to take the head-ring, the form of dressing the hair which formerly marked a married Ngoni man, and they were told they could marry and retire from the army. The older Ngoni declared that young men were not allowed to sleep with girls at all until they joined the army. Even then the relationship had to be initiated by the girl expressing her preference for a lover, and then sex relations were limited to partial intercourse. It was at marriage, after having been given the head-ring, that Ngoni youths were called 'men'. They moved out of the dormitory and built a hut for their wives in the area behind the huts belonging to their father's house. The cattle handed over on their marriage to the bride's family were taken from the herd belonging to that house.

9: Read E-5 (1935) 1936 FR5 Ngoni FR5
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occasion on which he made known any new laws before the assembled leaders of his country. The ceremony was marked by special songs and dances performed only at that time. It was an occasion on which economics, religion, politics, social life and recreation were brought together in a dramatic form in the part played by the Paramount Chief *vis-à-vis* his people. When speaking of these 'good old days' the Ngoni always refer to the *Inqwala*, for it was to them symbolic of the greatness of their *Inkosi*, and of how 'they lived well' before the *Azungu* came as despoilers.

On the subject of warfare and of training for war the Ngoni will talk for hours. Among the many things which they mourn in the passing of the old order, they regret most the military training of youths and men, and the age-grade system which was part of it. They point out how a youth had his appointed companions to whom he stood in a recognized relationship of mutual obligation and assistance, and with these companions he went through the grades of calf-herding and cattle-herding until he graduated into a regiment. The field worker can observe how much Ngoni 'national feeling' was bound up with memories of war days, when to-day they put on their war dress and dance war dances at a chief's village. I have seen Chewa men and women huddle together during these war dances, and mutter, 'Too many Ngoni are here', as if they were still in the days of fighting and raids, while the Ngoni warriors swagger about, swishing their kilts of skins and brandishing their shields and spears with every appearance of reality. I have heard accounts of Ngoni raids for cattle going as far as the Kafue River, into the Mashukulumbwe country, given with such details of the places on the march that I think they must be substantially correct. Even if it is legendary, the recital of such raids still fosters Ngoni pride and distinction, and I have heard an old man who took part in such a raid compare it scornfully with young men going nowadays to Broken Hill and the Copper Belt. 'They go only for money', he said, 'We went for our *izidlodlo*[1] and for cattle to honour the *inkosi*'.

The Ngoni are realists and they admit that while they planted their institutions in the country and maintained most of them, at the same time a measure of adjustment was going on to the local cultures. For

[1] Head-ring, the sign of a warrior ready to marry.